



Al-Risala 1989

March

God's Signs in Nature

Natural disasters can be looked at either as part of "the problem of evil", as the philosophers put it, or as part of nature's warning system – which is how the Prophets see them. God's prophets explain calamities such as droughts, earthquakes, hurricanes, tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, etc., as scaled-down previews of the much greater calamity which will befall man on the Day of Resurrection. They are a powerful reminder that we are all headed for that dire day on which – in our destitute and helpless condition – we shall finally witness the appearance of God before us in all His Power and Glory. On that day the veil which has screened us from the awful truth will be torn away, and we shall be left, face to face with our Maker.

Man's first instinct will be to flee, but there will be nowhere for him to take refuge. He will cry out for help, but there will be no one to come to his rescue. He will be like the climber who sees no escape from an avalanche, or the fisherman who sees the tempest sweep his boat irretrievably away.

Wise is the man who recognizes such calamities as a warning of nature rather than as a senseless evil. One who does so will humble himself before his Lord and attempt once again to bring moral order into the chaos of his life. He will thus set his foot on the path to Paradise. On the other hand, one who sees in natural disasters only signs of nature's evil, will very soon find himself on the slippery downward path to hellfire and damnation.

2 March 1989

People are losing just what they want to find

The Prophet said: "How wonderful paradise is Yet those who seek it have fallen asleep. And how terrible the Fire of Hell is. Yet those who dread it are also asleep."

The Good Monotheist

“Allah – there is no god but Him. In Allah let the faithful put their trust.”

Religion is not worthy of the name unless it hinges solely on monotheism. Islam, therefore, demands that all of one's attention be turned to God, to the exclusion of all else.

Belief in one God implies trusting God above all else and reserving all one's emotions of love and fear and hope for Him alone. With man's ability to think and feel, he needs a focal point to which he may relate and in which he may repose his trust. By his very nature, man seeks some external point of dependence. Unable wholly to rely on his own meagre inner resources, he seeks a prop in life – one which will compensate for his own shortcomings. But the worship of entities other than God (i.e. polytheism) is no solution to the problem. Monotheism, as advocated by Islam, and in accordance with which all feelings of devotion and adoration are directed towards God, is the true solution to man's problems.

The Quran gives due warning to those who are attracted by polytheism: “There are some who make others equal to God, bestowing on them the adoration due to God, though, the love of God is stronger in the faithful. But if only they could see their punishment, the wrongdoers would know that might is His alone, and that God is stern in retribution” (2: 165).

The true monotheist is one who discovers God in all His perfection, and regards Him as his greatest treasure. This is indeed the greatest discovery that man can make. It is only natural then that he should be filled with love and devotion for Him, and that he should also fear His wrath. “They vied with each other in good works and called on Us with piety, fear and submission.” (Quran, 21:90)

Take a Second Look at Ambitions

Everyone dreams of everlasting life and unalloyed bliss – in short, of paradise. But if, believing in paradise and yearning after it, one does nothing to make oneself fit in the eyes of God to enter its gates, that is little better than coveting the wares on display in a shop, then refusing to pay the price for the items one longs to carry away.

The greatest obstacle to moral preparedness for entry into God's paradise is the constant striving to build a material paradise right here on earth. In the mistaken belief that wealth brings happiness, people spend their entire lives amassing great fortunes. Even more misguided are those who direct their energies towards acquiring great power and all the satisfactions that they imagine will result from it. The power-hungry and the fortune-hunters do not realize that such objectives are unworthy and the happiness to be derived from them ephemeral, if not entirely illusory, for neither wealth nor power brings the total happiness they so frantically seek. How often do we see the rich and the powerful a prey to boredom, spiritual unease and paranoid delusion. The more they heap up comforts and luxuries around themselves, the less they can lay claim to inner peace.

Even those who make health a great objective in life, to the exclusion of all else, cannot expect life to go on in a pleasant and untrammelled fashion for ever and ever, for old age and death cannot be kept forever at bay. Health, of course, is important, but, like wealth and power, it cannot be man's supreme objective. His supreme objective must be to turn himself into the kind of moral being on whom God will look with favour on the final day of reckoning: the paradise he dreams of is not in this life but on the far side of the grave. Those who attempt to make a paradise for themselves on this earth will face the greatest disappointment of all when they come to face their Maker on the Day of Judgement, for they will find that paradise is the very thing which will be denied to them in the after life. How tragic that one's efforts to achieve one's greatest ambition in life are what, in fact, condemn one to forfeit that ambition in the Hereafter.

Paradise is not for Everyone

“One who will have even an iota of pride will not enter heaven.”

There is nothing more contrary to the true nature of things than to worship people, places, objects and idea as if they were on a par with God. Indulging in polytheism in this way is the greatest of crimes in the eyes of God and renders one unfit to inhabit the gardens of paradise in the afterlife. Even having too much reverence for oneself – the sin of pride – will have the same catastrophic effect. The only thing which will save one is the discovery of the one God and the realization that nothing and no one can ever be His equal.

According to Abdullah ibn Masood, the Prophet was quite categorical on this subject: “One who will have even an iota of pride will not enter heaven.” When asked what was meant by pride, he said, “To ignore and reject the truth and look down upon people.” On the subject of polytheism, the Quran says, “God will not forgive those who associate other gods with Him; but He will forgive whom He will for other sins. He that associates other gods with Him is guilty of heinous sin.”

The world we live in is necessarily an imperfect one, because we are here to be tried and tested. That means that all kinds of people, inhabit the earth – the good, the bad and the indifferent. But the next life will unfold in an ideal world – that of the Hereafter – in which not the slightest flaw will be permissible. There, the only ones to attain positions of honour will be those who have proved themselves worthy in the present world of trial, in the sense that they have clearly differentiated between the true and the false. Those who indulged in pride, and made polytheism their religion, were living on an unrealistic plane. Their lives were full of falsity and illusion.

Paradise is for those sublime souls who live in the consciousness of God’s eternal greatness. Those lowly, debased creatures who are preoccupied with their own greatness, and who revere others besides God, can never enter its gates.

Turning the Scales of Justice

On the Day of Reckoning, God's court of justice will be set up, and what an awesome affair it will be. No contumacy, denial, or attempts at obfuscation will be brooked. The great, the rich, the powerful will be rejected as being unworthy of giving evidence and, instead the lowly, the humble, and the unassuming will be set up as God's witnesses. The veils of false piety will be snatched away and the honeyed eloquence of the hypocrites will be exposed for the hollow pretence that it is. Only the pure in spirit, the true servants of God will be asked to give the testimony which will decide the eternal fate of humanity. They may have been the most disregarded and negligible of people, but it will be their word which, on the brink of eternity, will turn the scales of divine justice.

The Prophet Mohammed once asked his companion, Abdullah Ibn Masood, to read him a part of the Quran. The latter was astonished at this request, as it was to the Prophet himself that 'the Quran had been revealed. But when the Prophet explained that he liked to hear it read by someone else, he readily complied. He began by reciting the surah al-Nisa. When he reached the verse, "How will it be when we produce a witness from every nation and call upon you to testify against them?" (4:41), he suddenly stopped, for he could see that the Prophet's eyes had filled with tears. Well might the Prophet grieve in advance over the fate of mankind on that terrible day. For in the next world, man will be deprived of all worldly props and he will be brought into God's court as the saint or sinner that he is. The tables will indeed be turned on that day, with the lowliest of creatures being set up on high, and the highest in the land being cast down into the depths. If one could only conceive of the rigours of that day, one would cease to succumb too easily to the allurements of worldly things: worldly honour and glory would then be seen to be on one and the same plane with worldly disgrace.

A Day whose Space is Fifty Thousand Years

“He is the Lord of the Ladders, by which the angels and the spirit will ascend to Him in one day: a day whose space is fifty thousand years” (70:3-4).

Everyone is familiar with the idea that God created the world in six days. The Bible tells us so, and so does the Quran. But the notion of the creation of our world and everything in it in a mere six, days has now become untenable in the light of recent scientific findings. In fact, there is no way that the ‘days’ could even have existed when the natural phenomena which produces them, i.e. the earth and its rotation round the sun, were still not supposedly in existence. In *The Bible, the Quran and Science*, Dr. Maurice Bucaille writes:

“The idea that successive phases of the Creation....could have been compressed into the space of one week is one that cannot be defended from a scientific point of view. Today we are perfectly aware that the formation of the Universe and the Earth took place in stages that lasted for very long periods (p.27).”

But we need not allow this apparent inconsistency with modern scientific data to shake our fundamental beliefs. The Quran, indeed tells us that “He governs all things from heaven to earth. And in the end it will ascend to Him in one day, a day whose space is a thousand years by your reckoning” (32:5). Another verse says, “.... Each day with your Lord is like a thousand years in your reckoning” (22:47). Yet another verse equates the day to an even longer period.” He is the Lord of the Ladders, by which the angels and the spirit will ascend to Him in one day: a day whose space is fifty thousand years,” (70:34),

If we look at the original Arabic Quran, we find that the word used for “day” (*yaum*, pl. *ayyam*) is one that does not necessarily refer to the interval of time that elapses between two successive sunrises or sunsets for an inhabitant of the earth. The word can also have the broader meaning of a ‘period of time’ as is evident from the above-quoted verses. This means that we may interpret the creation of the heavens and the earth to have taken place in six ‘periods of time’ or, as Abdullah Yusuf Ali writes in his commentary on the Quran (1934), six “stages in the evolution of physical nature,” (p. 1290). This would make our fundamental dogma quite compatible with modern scientific data.

It is obviously essential to be in possession of divine scriptures which have been preserved in their original form, without interpolation, distortion or damaging omissions due to neglect. Of all the religious works which we have at our disposal at the moment, the Quran is the only one which meets such exacting historical requirements. It has been preserved intact to this very day in pure and pristine form. It is, therefore, to the Quran which we must turn if we wish to bring scientific exactitude to our acquisition of learning.

God-Fearing People

They ask you about the spoils. Say: "The spoils belong to God and the Messenger. So fear God and settle your disputes. Obey God and His Messenger if you are true believers." The true believers are those whose hearts are filled with awe at the mention of God, and whose faith grows stronger as they listen to his revelations. They put their trust in their Lord, pray steadfastly, and give in alms of that which We have given them. Such are the true believers. They shall be exalted and forgiven by their Lord, and a generous provision shall be made for them. (Quran, 8: 1-4)

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Heavenly Souls

Indeed man was created impatient. When evil befalls him he is despondent, but blessed with good fortune he grows niggardly. Not so the worshippers who are steadfast in prayer; who set aside a due portion of their goods for the needy and the dispossessed; who truly believe in the Day of Reckoning and dread the punishment of their Lord, for none is secure from the punishment of God; who preserve their chastity save with their wives and slave girls, for in their case they are not blameworthy: whoever lusts after other than these is a transgressor; who keep their trusts and promises and bear true witness; and who attend to their prayers. These shall be in gardens, honoured. (Quran 70: 19-35)

Ideological Fanaticism

This world is a world of trial, the most subtle objective of which is to discover whether we are fully aware that conviction may rest on false premises, and whether we understand the need to make constant reappraisals of what normally passes for conviction. Are we ready, in other words, to strike down ill-founded fanaticism in our pursuit of the truth?

According to a *Hindustan Times* news item of May 18, 'Stalin Uprooted 15 Million People,' a documentary is officially being televised in the Soviet Union, which shows the atrocities committed by the former socialist ruler, Joseph Stalin, as they actually happened. While he was in power, from 1924 to 1953, Stalin had large numbers of his countrymen brutally massacred, not sparing even socialist leaders, such as Nikolai Bukharin, who was killed in 1938. Today, forty years later, his wife is mounting public platforms to tell people how her husband was killed, although he was an innocent man. Stalin had had Bukharin killed as if he were a felon, if the truth could be told, it was Stalin himself who was the hardened wrong-doer. Bukharin's wife speaks of Stalin with perfect candour when she says, "I consider him a criminal."

The documentary shows scenes of wholesale destruction of rural life with the beginning of collectivization. More than 3 million peasant households – which means 15 million people – were uprooted by the dictator. It was this, says a noted commentator, that transformed the Soviet Union from an exporter of grains into an importer.

In the days when Stalin was carrying these cruel plans into effect, the USSR not only had enough foodgrains for its own consumption, but was also in a position to export surpluses. In contrast, Saudi Arabia was at that time a desert country which needed to import all its foodgrains. Today, the situation is quite the reverse, the USSR having become the importer of foodgrains, while Saudi Arabia now has Surplus stocks. In 1988, Saudi Arabia grew more than 2 million tons of foodgrains, of which 50,000 tons of wheat were sold to the USSR.

We are compelled to ask how Stalin came to commit an act which was not only the worst kind of blunder from the economic point of view, but also a crime of the greatest magnitude from the social point of view. The reason, in short, was ideological fanaticism. History abounds in instances of powerful individuals imposing their ideas on large numbers of people by force, only for it to be discovered after bitter experience that what had appeared to be a great truth was nothing other than the distortions of ideological fanaticism. It is not unusual for blind zeal – as opposed to the genuine quest for truth – to create conditions of widespread suffering and sacrifice.

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Prosperity is a more Severe Test

The Prophet once said: "I fear more for you the test of prosperity than the test of adversity, for when you were afflicted by adversity, you were patient; but if the world becomes green and pleasant, you will fall a prey to temptation." The following words were also spoken by the Prophet: You will be given so much worldly abundance that this is what will make you go astray after me."

More Engrossed In the Qur'an than Anything Else

Whenever Umer sent officials on their duties, he would make them promise that they would not ride on horseback, would not eat white bread, would not wear fine clothes, and would not close their door to the needy. If they disputed any of these points, they were liable to be punished. When he had taken this promise, he would dispatch them. He would say to any official he was relieving of his duties: "I did not authorize you to take Muslims' blood; nor did I give you license to persecute them, attack their honour and appropriate their property. I appointed you to establish prayer and distribute wealth and revenues among them. You were sent to do justice." Umer also used to tell his officials to remain engrossed in the Quran as much as possible, and be sparing in relating traditions of the Prophet (in case a statement should be attributed to the Prophet which he had not made). "And I am with you," he would assure them.

The Quran: A Miracle of History

The Quran has the distinction of being the one and only book dating back to ancient times about which everything is fully known and established, and whose authenticity comes up to all the standards of history.

Two of the books written in Greek in ancient Greece have retained their fame and popularity right down to the present day – the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the former being the story of the siege of Troy by the Greeks, and the latter being the story of a heroic journey made by Ulysses. Of considerable literary importance, these books have been translated into several languages. What is unusual is that this literary heritage has been passed on from generation to generation without anyone being absolutely certain about their authorship. It is usually considered, for want of a better explanation, that the author of both books was Homer, who probably lived in the 8th century B.C. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* informs us that “virtually nothing is known about the life of Homer” (Vol. V, p. 103).

Researchers have, of course, disputed this attribution. Samuel Butler (1835-1902), for instance, thought that the *Odyssey* had been written by a woman. It has been opined too that the *Iliad* had many authors and was edited in stages.

Most ancient books, are the subject of such literary disputes, for the information on them is so inadequate that no clear historical picture of them emerges.

The Quran has the distinction of being the one and only book dating back to ancient times about which everything is fully known and established, and whose authenticity comes up to all the standards of history. When the revelations of the Quran began to be made in 610, to whom were they made? To Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Abdul Muttalib. Where was he born and where did he die? He was born in Mecca in 571 and died in Medina in 632, what was the language of the Quran? Arabic. Who were its calligraphists? Abu Bakr ibn Qahafa, Umar ibn al Khattab, Usman ibn Affan, Ali ibn abi Talib, Zubair ibn al Awain, Zaid ibn Thabit, Amir ibn Fahira, Abu Ayyub Husain, Ubayy ibn Kaab, Muamya ibn abi Sufijan, Abdullah ibn Masood, etc.

Similarly, whatever questions are asked on the subject of the Quran, and the person to whom it was revealed, can be answered clearly and with absolute certainty, whereas this cannot be said in favour of any other books dating back to ancient times.

God and the Occult

According to tax authorities in France, there are 50,000 registered clairvoyants-more than there are priests and doctors – with a business turnover of about 600 million dollars. It would seem that, in France, the occult is flourishing, with one in every four of the working population, i.e. an estimated 8 million people, consulting a clairvoyant, a sorcerer or an astrologist. (AFP, Paris)

Many blame the economic recession and its attendant ills for the increase in physical and psychological ailments. But why should it be to clairvoyance and to the occult that people turn in their state of affliction? It is mainly in the hopes that if they find the key to the unknown factors which shape human destiny, they will in some measure be able to better their lot in life. The mistake they make is to turn to other human beings who are supposed to be endowed with “superior powers”, with extra-sensory perception and with a great deal else which could never stand up to investigation. They suffer from the illusion that these allegedly special gifts can somehow alter human fate for the better in throwing light on the future course of individual lives. At best, this can be but a temporary prop in the face of material and spiritual hardship.

The one and only true source of spiritual nourishment is the lord God Almighty. Belief in and submission to God are the true solutions to human problems. No human being, however superior his gifts maybe, can equal God in His omnipotence. It is, therefore, regrettable that so many human beings have strayed so far away from their Creator and Sustainer that they can even think of occultism as a more effective source of assistance.

Never Despair

Acceptance of the present opens the door to a brighter future. Failure to do so deprives man not only of whatever the present has to offer, but also of what the future might hold in store. Man's best course is to engage in high thinking at all times, and never to sink into despair and the resulting state of inertia.

"That which does not kill one makes one stronger." This conclusion reached by a western thinker suggests a context in which human survival hovers on the brink of annihilation. It suggests survival achieved in the face to gigantic odds, and the great lesson taught by that experience. The learning of such a lesson is ideally what should happen when one is forced to struggle against adversity, but it is only the wise man who can turn unfavourable circumstances to good advantage. Where the common difficulties of life spell ruin for the unwise, for the wise those same difficulties become a ladder to progress.

To succeed in life one must never lose heart. "We need to get over the questions that focus on the past and on the pain – 'Why did this happen to me?' – and ask instead the question which opens the door to the future: "Now that this has happened, what shall I do about it.?" (Rabbi Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.)

The present world has been made in such a way that unpleasantness has to be confronted and obstacles overcome. Man is faced with a bewildering array of difficulties, not once but many times over. This being the situation, the only way to have a successful life is to forget the past and concentrate on the future. The disadvantaged should never waste their time in bewailing their losses. They should instead give all their attention to the remaining possibilities. And if they have to start all over again, they should lose no time in doing so.

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All For One and One For All

Every individual must, in the shaping of his own life, keep the larger interests of society in view, just as society must, in its general development, work towards the betterment of individuals. Thus the objectives and functioning of both society and individuals should be strictly in consonance with each other.

In such matters, excellent coordination is essential if harmony is to prevail. If we wish to have an example on which to model ourselves to the best advantage, we do not have very far to look for it. We have it there before our very eyes in the shape of the universe, for God has set us an example of harmonious living on the most colossal of scales. We need only observe how all of the innumerable forces in nature function with unerring precision and complete predictability to understand what is meant by perfectly coordinated interaction. As Emerson has so aptly put it, "Nature works on a method of all for each and each for all." This sums up the divine scheme of the universe, the workings of which make a permanent appeal to mankind to maintain an equilibrium of interests, whether at the individual or at the societal level. If man were to heed this universal message, he would surely never stray from the straight and narrow path which leads him so felicitously to finding favour in the eyes of God; he would never do anything of a damaging nature to the structure of society, for it is from society itself that man derives his physical sustenance.

In this respect, he is just like the tree in relation to the universe. The tree needs sunlight, warmth, moisture, air, soil and gravity if it is to survive, let alone grow and develop into a monarch of the forest. All of these requirements are met by elements which are already permanent features of the universe. And our world, in turn, benefits from the things the tree has to offer us-fruit, flowers, timber, oxygen, conservation of soil and moisture, shade, and so on. There is a chain of reciprocity, which, if it were broken would be disastrous for both man and his environment. Similarly, man and society must have a constant interchange of the benefits each has to offer. Without this, society would descend into chaos; and the very survival of the individual would be in grave jeopardy.

On the Brink

Death constantly hovering over us, we should make haste to become worthy of entering the gates of paradise. Otherwise we shall find ourselves teetering on the brink of the yawning abyss of hell.

Imagine a man standing on the outskirts of a village built on the slopes of a volcano. He looks towards the summit, where he sees large puffs of smoke emerging and he feels the earth trembling beneath his feet. Clearly the volcano is about to erupt, but the villagers seem to be unaware of the danger. They go about their daily tasks in the fields and in their homes. They are totally preoccupied by their crops, their animals, their houses, their families. What should this man who is standing at the edge of the village do? Run away from both volcano and village? Run into the village and start discussing crop rotation, the sale of wool from lambs, the latest irrigation techniques? It is quite obvious that neither course would satisfy the moral imperatives of the situation: for what normal human being would not run into the village to warn the inhabitants of the impending catastrophe? It would only be a totally selfish, or mentally deranged person who would fail to see this as a clear-cut duty.

Now imagine a man standing between this world and the next. On the one side he can see our present world and on the other the gardens of paradise and the fires of hell. What ought he to do? Keep quiet about the delights of paradise and the tortures of hell, while he discusses all kinds of trivialities? Should he make no mention of what the afterlife holds in store while he dwells upon all kinds of mundane issues? Clearly, he has the same kind of urgent duty to perform as the man standing on the slopes of the volcano. He must take prompt action, waste no time on irrelevancies, impress upon people their nearness to calamity, and should not leave off his entreaties to face the truth until he is satisfied that his message has genuinely made its mark. And what should that message be? That with death constantly hovering over us, we should make haste to become worthy of entering the gates of paradise. Otherwise we shall find ourselves teetering on the brink of the yawning abyss of hell.

A Life Well Worth Living

“Everything and everyone is disappearing – Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin. What an amazing happening, and well worth recording in my diary. But that will also suddenly disappear.”

So wrote Beatrice Webb, one of the outstanding leaders of the Fabian society, in 1943, half way through the second world war.

Even in peace time, outstanding people appear on the world's stage, show what brilliant stuff they are made of, then quickly disappear, not apparently by their own choice, but like so many puppets on a string. Some, like George Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell, manage to last the course much longer than others, but, sooner or later, everyone has to succumb to the inevitable. No matter how brilliant one's career, one has ultimately to die.

The fact that human beings are continually departing this life, when there is still so much to be achieved, still so many all-time highs to be registered, seems to make no sense. It all seems pointless and unjust. Life's very ephemerality to its utter futility and, in despair, we wonder why we have to be born at all, if after such a brief spell in this world, we are all to be snuffed out, like so many candles. It is only if we accept that there is a life after death, an eternal existence, that we see some meaning in life. It is only if we give credence to what the prophets have told us of the hereafter, that we see everything fall into place, and have no further regrets about how transient life on earth is. Then, and only then does life seem to be well worth living, and not just a meaningless, mechanical series of events.

As Easy as Breathing

Islam is absolutely free of confusing complications and undue formality. Simplicity is prized, because it is essential to the spirit of Islam. In all worship, it is the spirit of Islam which is emphasized, for the form which worship takes is considered of secondary Importance.

When the Prophet of Islam made his farewell pilgrimage - the only one which he made, in fact – just a few months before his death, in the year 10 A.H., he commenced the ritual of *sa'i* (running seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwah) from the hill of Safa, saying as he did so, "Safa and Marwah are God's beacons. (Quran, 2:158) "I am starting where God started." In the verse of the Quran which mentions Safa and Marwah, Safa is the first-mentioned of the two. The Prophet, therefore, considered it quite natural to start his *sa'i* at Safa, then proceed to Marwah, because that was the sequence followed in the Quran.

The order in which the Prophet chose to perform this ritual may not seem of very great importance, in actual fact, it is of considerable significance, for it demonstrates Islam's preference for simplicity. In every area of Islamic teaching, this preference is in evidence, for Islam is absolutely free of confusing complications and undue formality. Simplicity is prized, because it is essential to the spirit of Islam. In all worship, it is the spirit of Islam which is emphasized, for the form which worship takes is considered of secondary importance. There is no intellectual complexity in the tenets of Islam, therefore, there are no artificial compulsions about accepting them; Islam is quite simply based on the realities of life, so that entering and remaining within the Islamic fold is as easy as breathing in the air around us.

When after circumambulating the House of God in Mecca the Prophet began his *sa'i*, from Safa, he wanted to make things easy for those who came after him. If he had begun from Marwah, people might have felt confused about the proper sequence, and would not have felt certain whether to begin at Safa, as is mentioned in the Quran, or to begin at Marwah, so as to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet. The Prophet, therefore, adhered to the sequence in the Quran, so that there should be no doubt in people's minds, and so that the carrying out of this ritual should never appear difficult.

Then, there will be no place whatsoever for deception, delusion or concealment. When God's tape is re-played, not even the tiniest of details of the past will escape scrutiny in God's court. At that stage, all God's creature who are on the verge of entering the afterlife, will receive exactly what they are due. Nothing more. Nothing less. All will be answerable for everything that has been said and done, and upon that will depend our eternal fate.

God Gives More than He Takes

Willingness to make sacrifices presupposes firm faith in God. It was such a faith that Abraham demonstrated when he brought himself to the very point of slitting his own son's throat. In a dream, Abraham saw himself sacrificing his own son and interpreted this as the will of God. Eager to carry out God's commandment, he had put the knife to his child's throat when he heard the voice of the Almighty commanding him to stop. He had already passed the divine test by showing how whole-hearted he was in obeying the word of God. He was then given a lamb to sacrifice instead.

This momentous happening shows us that, in most cases, when a sacrifice is called for, it is not accepted. It is not the sacrifice itself which is considered so desirable, but the willingness to make it. Any unwillingness to do so shows inadequate faith in God. It amounts to distrust of God's love. Yet God gives far more than He takes, being the most kind and compassionate Creator and Sustainer. Abraham, after all, was asked to present to God only his son, whereas God, in return, conferred to Abraham the leadership of the whole world.

Measuring Up

Muslims take tremendous pride in being the chosen bearers of the authentic divine scripture. Far from being a matter of pride, however, it is a great responsibility, for it means conveying the word of God not only to Arabic-speaking peoples, but to people all over the world. Since the Quran was written in classical Arabic, spreading the divine message calls for accurate translations into every language in the world and one might imagine that this work would already have been undertaken with great thoroughness and zeal. But this is not the case. The Quran, to date, has been translated into very few modern languages.

Compare this with the achievement of the Christians who have had the Bible translated into 286 languages, the New Testament into another 594, with partial translations into a further 928 languages. Complete Bible translations are available in 109 African, 90 Asian and 55 European tongues. In Latin America the Bible has been translated into Spanish and Portuguese, and full versions are soon to be published in two South American Indian languages.

This remarkable record reveals tremendous enthusiasm on the part of Christians to spread the word of God. Can Muslims honestly say that they measure up to this standard?

19 March 1989

Spiritual States can be Brought about only if Conditions are Conducive

The Prophet was visited by an angel. "Mohammad," he said, "the Lord greets you. He says that, if you wish, he will turn the rocky terrain of Mecca into gold." The Prophet lifted up his eyes to heaven. "Lord," he said. 'Please, no. I prefer to be full one day and hungry the next. When I go hungry, I humble myself before you and seek your help, and when I eat my fill, I give thanks to you and praise you."

A Solution-Oriented Approach

Probably the most important event of the current year is the inception of a new spirit of accommodation between the USSR and the USA. *Time* magazine (May 30, 1988) has aptly defined it as a 'grand compromise.'

Reckoned as super powers, the USSR and the USA are rivals of 70 years standing, with a long history of repeated confrontations. The media of both blocs, in keeping up a steady flow of reciprocal condemnation, has played a significant role in aggravating the situation. But now, after this marathon of accusation and counteraccusation, both powers are – miraculously – beginning to talk of peace. Instead of relentlessly pursuing the arms race, they are at last giving their much-needed attention to what appear to be fruitful negotiations on the de-escalation of international tensions.

A Soviet official has described this new policy as 'solution-oriented.' Where, hitherto, each blocs had been out to paint the iniquities of the other in the blackest of hues, both are now glossing them over in their new fervour of finding solutions to mutual problems.

This thaw, which is at present taking place in the long-standing cold war between the USSR and the USA, has a great lesson in it for other nations. Surely, if the policy of headlong confrontation has become such a costly procedure that even the super powers can no longer afford it, it should be obvious that the smaller nations are even less well-equipped to pursue so ultimately destructive a course.

Towards Realism

While Nikita Krushchev was First Secretary of the Central Communist Party of the USSR (1958-1964), he made known his, and his countrymen's feelings towards the capitalist world when he uttered his now well-known threat: 'We will bury you.' (*Hindustan Times*, June 28, 1988)

In the same vein, American President Ronald Reagan dubbed the Soviet union an 'evil empire' and American officials boasted that they would push the Soviet Union into the sea." However, in spite of these periodic, aggressive face-offs, and after 70 years of socialist revolution, the countries of both blocs have at last seen a change of outlook as an overwhelming imperative, and American leaders have begun visiting Moscow for negotiations. Ronald Reagan himself visited Moscow from June 28 to July 2, 1988, despite his previous view that such a visit was out of the question. Before his visit, he went on record as saying that US relations with Moscow "must be guided by realism". (*Hindus tan Times*, May 26, 1988)

The arms race has been going on between the two countries now for 40 years. While both countries had been going all out to make the deadliest weapons in history with the avowed intention of destroying one another, today they are themselves placing curbs upon their own manufacture and acquisition of

weapons, and are even destroying certain categories of weapons which are already major items in their respective stockpiles. The *Times of India* of August 3 (Section 2, p.1) reports that the Soviet Union today destroyed four shorter range missiles, OTR-22, at the test range in Saryozek, 200 Km north west of Alma Ata. The dismantling was carried out in accordance with the INF treaty signed between Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev and President Reagan. The missiles were destroyed in the presence of a US inspection team. Representatives from various countries, including India, and other international non-government organization were also present.

The Soviets will dismantle 1752 deployed and stored missiles, having a range of 500 Km to 5500 Km, in three years. The US will eliminate 859 such missiles."

Cause of Change

We do not have to go far to find the reason for this dramatic change in the super power's policy. It is simply that in their attempt to gain the upperhand in all that has to do with arms supremacy they had – wittingly or unwittingly– allowed the progress of their respective countries to come to a standstill. After a relentless weapons race, which a fear-ridden, blame-oriented psychology had prolonged for half a century, they have come to the conclusion, when all is said and done, that the continued adoption of such a course could produce only negative results. It has finally dawned on them that, in attempting to destroy the 'enemy', they have brought their own countries to the very brink of annihilation.

A Reversal of Policy

It is ironic that the USA's insistence on arms superiority has caused it to fall behind its old, conquered enemy, Japan, in the economic field. Today, the US is the world's largest debtor with a net foreign debt of \$400 billion, while Japan is the world's largest creditor, with a net foreign investment of \$240 billion. This year, Japan had budgeted for \$10 billion as foreign aid, displacing the US (\$ 92.2 billion) as the world's most generous donor. The American dollar, which once reigned supreme in the economic world no longer enjoys that position. Economists are even asking, "Can America maintain its superpower status?"

In an interview (*Times of India*, August 9, 1988) Mr. Henry Kissinger observed that "the fundamental new fact will be the emergence of new power centres. China and India Will become more powerful. Japan is daily growing stronger.... so the United States will have to adjust to having other countries, that in the past it had a tendency to ignore, pursue more active policies."

The 19th All-Union Party Conference, held in the last week of June, 1988, in Moscow, was attended by 5000 delegates from all over the Soviet Union. On this occasion, the Soviet Prime Minister, Mikhail Gorbachev made a three and a half hour speech, which has been ably summarized by Mr. Quentin Peel, a journalist who not only heard the speeches of the Soviet leaders, but also had meetings with them.

Peel says, "The message seemed plain enough, the party would have to renounce its stifling role in the administration and economy of the country. Power and privilege would have to be curbed, and science and initiative given their head if the Soviet Union were to compete with the rest of the world, let alone be a superpower." (*Times of India*, July 5, 1988)

Perestroika

Repeated failures to achieve, or even identify such production targets as would satisfy the requirements of the many peoples who make up the Soviet Union have compelled Mr. Gorbachev to bow to economic realities. Setting aside notions of Socialistic superiority, (the Soviets considered themselves superior to others because of their Socialistic set-up) he had launched a campaign to change the prevailing system in the USSR. The keynotes of this policy are *glasnost* and *perestroika*, Russian words which mean respectively 'openness' and 'restructuring'. Mr. Gorbachev goes into the practical details of this policy in a book which has been published in English under the title of *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*.

This new movement is bringing about changes in the Socialist structure of the USSR, which can only be described as revolutionary. Its basic policy includes everything from religious freedom to the development of friendly relations with the Soviets' traditional arch enemy, the USA.

Newspaper reports of these recent trends are heartening. Roy Gutman's account, originally published in the Los Angeles Times – Washington Post News Service, and relayed to Indian readers by the *Hindustan Times* (January 16, 1988) is entitled 'Kremlin, White House Now Realistic' (p.20). This report reveals just how historic has been the shift in US-Soviet relations in the wake of recent events. New thinking having emerged in both countries, the Kremlin and the White House are both becoming more open-minded about each other's affairs.

The extent to which attitudes are softening is illustrated by a Mr. Bessmertnykh, a veteran diplomat who served 12 years in the United States. In an interview with *Newsday* he said that the American administration had been fond of making such statements as: 'We shall draw the line, we shall go to the source, we shall stop the advance of communism.' "But now," said Mr. Bessmertnykh, "people have realized that the world has changed. You can't do it any more that way. It's impossible. Now both sides are becoming realistic. Their team and our team are both solution-oriented."

Conclusion

This change in the relationship between the USSR and America is of incalculable importance. The dropping of the policy of confrontation as being untenable from all points of view – moral, social, religious, economic, political – is one of the best lessons modern history has to give to mankind.

If the passing of unfavourable judgments on, and eternally remaining at loggerheads with the 'enemy' have ultimately been recognized as utterly futile pursuits by the world's two super powers, is it not the most basic common sense for the less developed countries (such as India and Pakistan) to try to improve the general tenor of their relations with disaffected nations who could, with a more rational approach, be won over as friends?

Wisdom, in today's global context, lies in being constructive, rather than in constantly plotting the downfall of others. Raising a great hue and cry over issue which could be peaceably resolved at the negotiating table only means the squandering of precious time and energy, which would be better devoted to bringing about national uplift.

It is high time we scrapped all blame-oriented policies, whether internal or international, in favour of solution-oriented policies. Herein lies the secret of success and progress.

AL-RISALA (English)

An announcement was made in the last issue of Al-Risala that because of lack of funds the publication was being discontinued. A large number of readers have, however, expressed great concern over this decision and have urged that the magazine should continue. In deference to the wishes of our esteemed readers we have therefore decided to continue publication for the time being.

It's continued publication however depends upon the monetary support of our readers and well-wishers. We therefore appeal for the support and generosity of all to participate in this cause for sustaining the *Dawah* work that is being done by this journal.